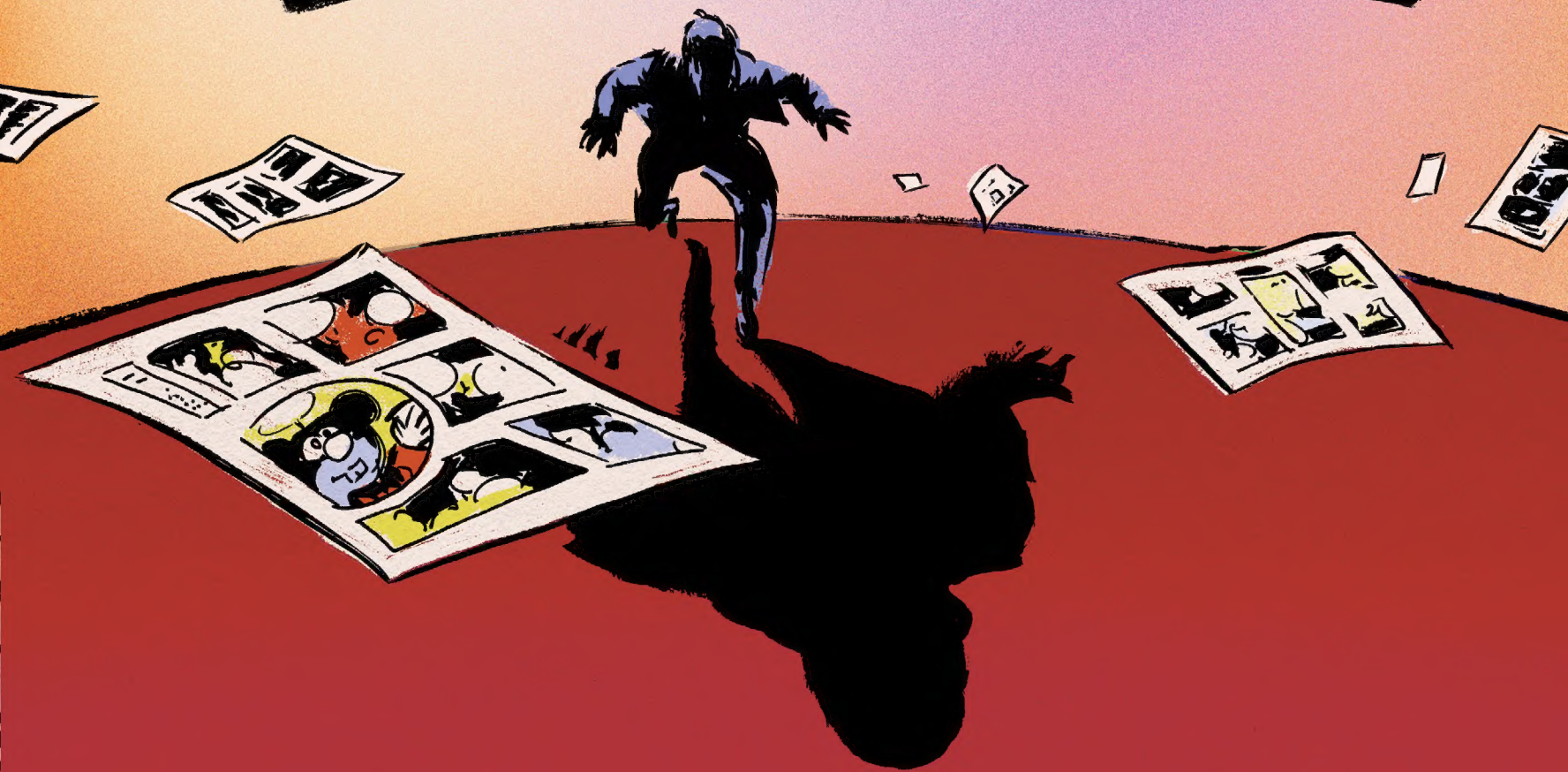


# IN PIC TOPIA

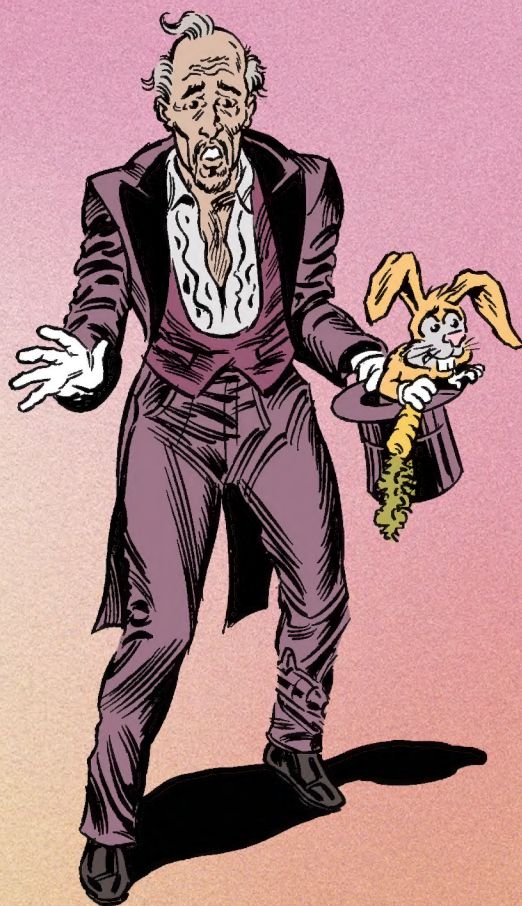


DONALD SIMPSON

WITH MIKE KAZALEH, PETE POPLASKI,  
AND ERIC VINCENT



# IN PIC TOPIA



CARTOONING BY DONALD SIMPSON  
WITH MIKE KAZALEH, PETE POPLASKI,  
AND ERIC VINCENT





MUH...  
BUHNUH...

OH, MAMA!  
DO NOT.  
I DON'T WANT  
TO DO IT!!!

**SAMMY SLEEPYHEAD**  
NEXT DOOR WOKE ME  
UP AT **FIVE-THIRTY**  
THIS MORNING.

NO!!!

OH, THIS IS **SWELL**, I  
DON'T THINK, MAMA!  
DON'T **TOUCH** ME SO!  
IT'S ALL OVER YOUR  
**HANDS!**

OH! OH!

**MELTED CHEESE!**  
**MELTED CHEESE!**  
OH MAMA, DO TAKE  
**CARE**, MY **SHEETS**  
WILL **TANGLE**  
FOR SURE!!!

HE WAS HAVING ANOTHER  
NIGHTMARE ABOUT HIS  
MOTHER.

NNG...  
**SHIT!!!**

OH! **WHAT NEXT?**  
HOW DEEP IS THIS  
**HOLE?** I MUST  
BE IN **CHINA!** OH!

**SAMMY, FOR GOD'S**  
**SAKE, WILL YOU SHUT**  
**UP?!! IT'S FIVE**  
**THIRTY!!!**

EVERY MORNING. EVERY  
MORNING HE WAKES ME UP.  
I CAN NEVER GET BACK  
TO **SLEEP.**



USUALLY, I GO OUT  
AND TAKE A DAWN  
STROLL AROUND  
PICTOPIA.

# IN PICTOPIA!!

YOU KNOW, JUST  
TO SEE HOW MUCH  
IS LEFT.

ALAN MOORE  
SCREEN PLAY  
DONALD SIMPSON  
DIRECTOR  
PETER POPLASKI  
SECOND UNIT  
BIG CROWD SCENES  
MIKE KAZALEH  
ANIMATION  
CARL STALLING  
MUSICAL SCORE  
ERIC VINCENT  
TECHNICOLOR

LEAVING THE PRINCE FEATURES  
TENEMENT, I RAN INTO RED  
(OF DEADWOOD AND RED, IF  
YOU REMEMBER) WHOSE APART-  
MENT IS TWO FLOORS DOWN  
FROM MINE.

SHE WAS JUST  
ARRIVING HOME.  
SHE HAD A  
SAILOR WITH HER.





RED! YOU'RE UP EARLY.

UH, NO. NO, LATE, ACTUALLY.

UH, NOCTURNO, THIS IS SOUTH-SEA SULLIVAN. HE, UH, HE'S A FRIEND HERE TO VISIT WHILE DEADWOOD IS AWAY, UH, RECUPERATING.

SOUTH SEA, THIS IS NOCTURNO THE NECROMANCER.

SURE.



NOW C'MON! GET YOUR SWEET ASS UPSTAIRS! I AIN'T PAYIN' FER STANDIN' TIME!

SHH! PLEASE! I HAVE TO LIVE IN THIS BUILDING!

POOR RED. I GUESS SHE HAD TROUBLE GETTING BY WHILE HER HUSBAND WAS AWAY...

...DRYING OUT.



OUTSIDE, THE SUN WAS COMING UP OVER THE ROMANCE QUARTER.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BEAUTIFUL.

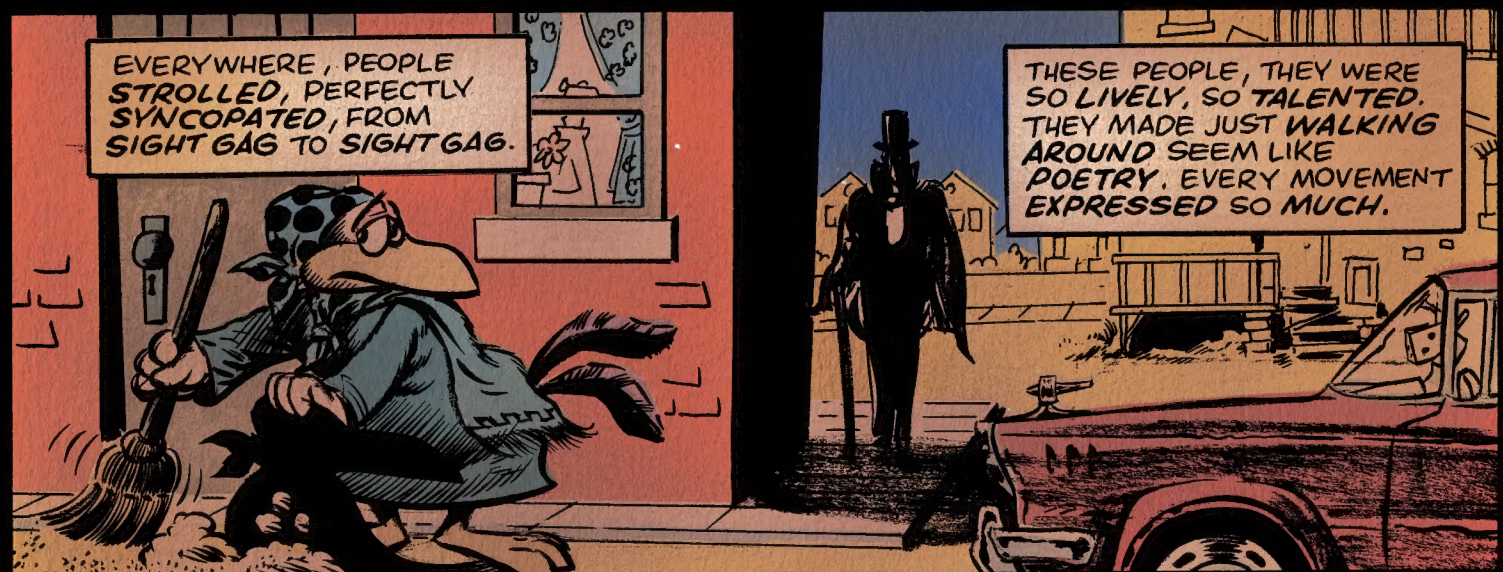
BUT SINCE THIS WAS ONE OF THE BLACK AND WHITE AREAS OF THE CITY, YOU DON'T REALLY GET THE EFFECT.



ONCE, I USED TO DREAM ABOUT MOVING TO THE COLOR SECTION UPTOWN, JUST FOR A FEW DAWNS AND SUNSETS, BUT I KNOW IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN.

ONLY SUPER-HEROES CAN AFFORD TO LIVE IN COLOR.



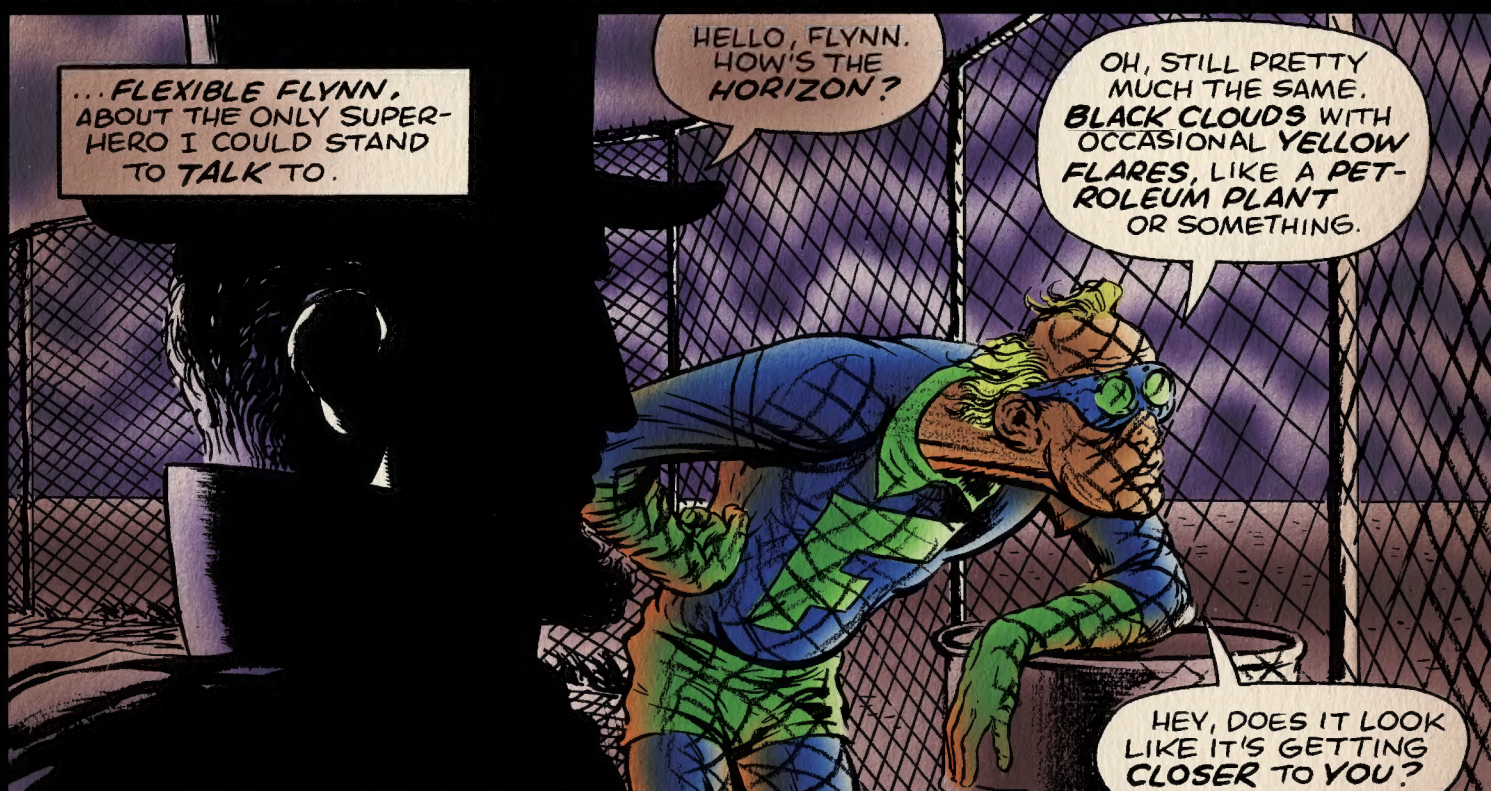






I WALKED ALL THE WAY TO THE WASTELANDS BEYOND FUNNYTOWN, RIGHT UP TO THE PERIMETER FENCE ...

... WHERE I KNEW I'D FIND AN OLD FRIEND...

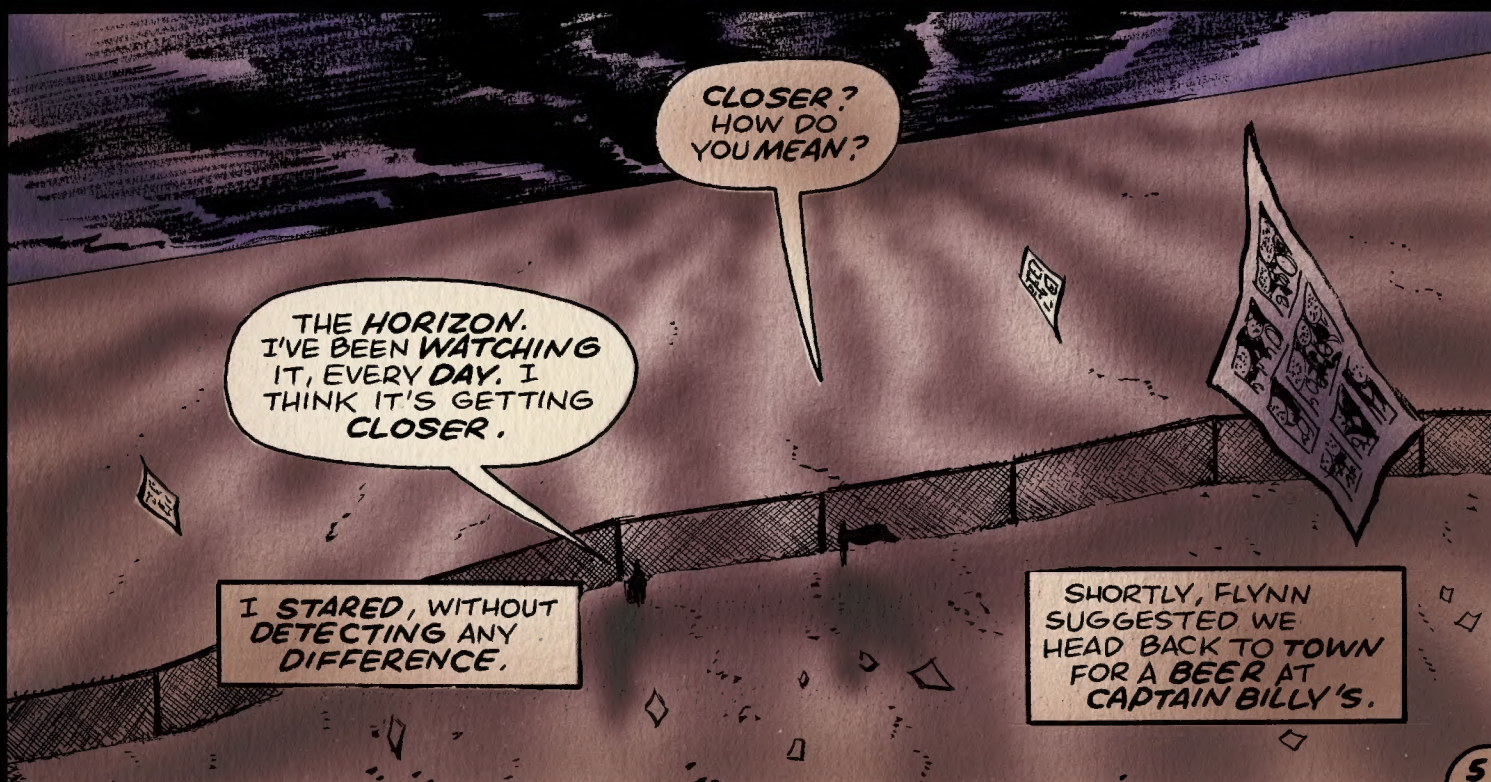


... FLEXIBLE FLYNN, ABOUT THE ONLY SUPER-HERO I COULD STAND TO TALK TO.

HELLO, FLYNN. HOW'S THE HORIZON?

OH, STILL PRETTY MUCH THE SAME. **BLACK CLOUDS** WITH OCCASIONAL **YELLOW FLARES**, LIKE A PETROLEUM PLANT OR SOMETHING.

HEY, DOES IT LOOK LIKE IT'S GETTING CLOSER TO YOU?



CLOSER? HOW DO YOU MEAN?

THE HORIZON. I'VE BEEN WATCHING IT, EVERY DAY. I THINK IT'S GETTING CLOSER.

I STARED, WITHOUT DETECTING ANY DIFFERENCE.

SHORTLY, FLYNN SUGGESTED WE HEAD BACK TO TOWN FOR A BEER AT CAPTAIN BILLY'S.



CAPTAIN BILLY'S WAS CROWDED. THE BOXENBECKER BOYS WERE THERE, ALONG WITH PRIVATE HERCULES AND THE TIGER LADY.

I LET FLYNN GET THE DRINKS. HE'S USEFUL LIKE THAT.

I STUCK TO BEER WHILE FLYNN DRANK WHIZBANGS, THE HOUSE COCKTAIL. HE SHOULDN'T HAVE.

HE GOT DRUNK SO QUICKLY. TALKATIVE DRUNK.

SOMETHIN'S GOIN' ON, Y'KNOW? IN THIS CITY! PEOPLE ARE VANISHING!

HAVE YOU SEEN TAILWIND TUCKER LATELY? OR MUGGSY AND JUGGS? NO... ME NEITHER.

AN' IT'S NOT JUST PEOPLE VANISHIN', I HEAR WHOLE AREAS OF THE CITY ARE DISAPPEARIN' OVERNIGHT.

THEY'RE HUSHIN' IT UP, CAUSE IT'S ELECTION YEAR.

ALL I SEE ARE THESE NEW PEOPLE... THESE NEW HEROES...

WALKIN' AROUND IN GANGS, LOOKIN' SUPERIOR, NOT TALKIN' TO ANYBODY.

SCARE ME SHITLESS.

FLYNN'S PARANOIA SEEMED UNSHAKEABLE. FINISHING MY BEER, I MADE EXCUSES AND LEFT.

...PEOPLE ARE BEING REPLACED!

OUTSIDE AND TWO BLOCKS SOUTH, I SPOTTED A BUNCH OF THE "NEW PEOPLE" FLYNN HAD MENTIONED.

THEY STOOD JOSTLING AROUND SOMETHING ON THE SIDEWALK, LAUGHING WITH DEEP, POWERFUL VOICES. I CROSSED THE STREET TO SEE WHAT IT WAS.



IT WAS AN OLD **DOG MAN** FROM **FUNNYTOWN**. THE NEW PEOPLE WERE **TORTURING** HIM.

MUTILATE A **FUNNY**, AND SECONDS LATER, IT'S **HEALED COMPLETELY**. OFTEN, THEY'LL LET YOU **DISFIGURE** THEM FOR A **BUCK**.



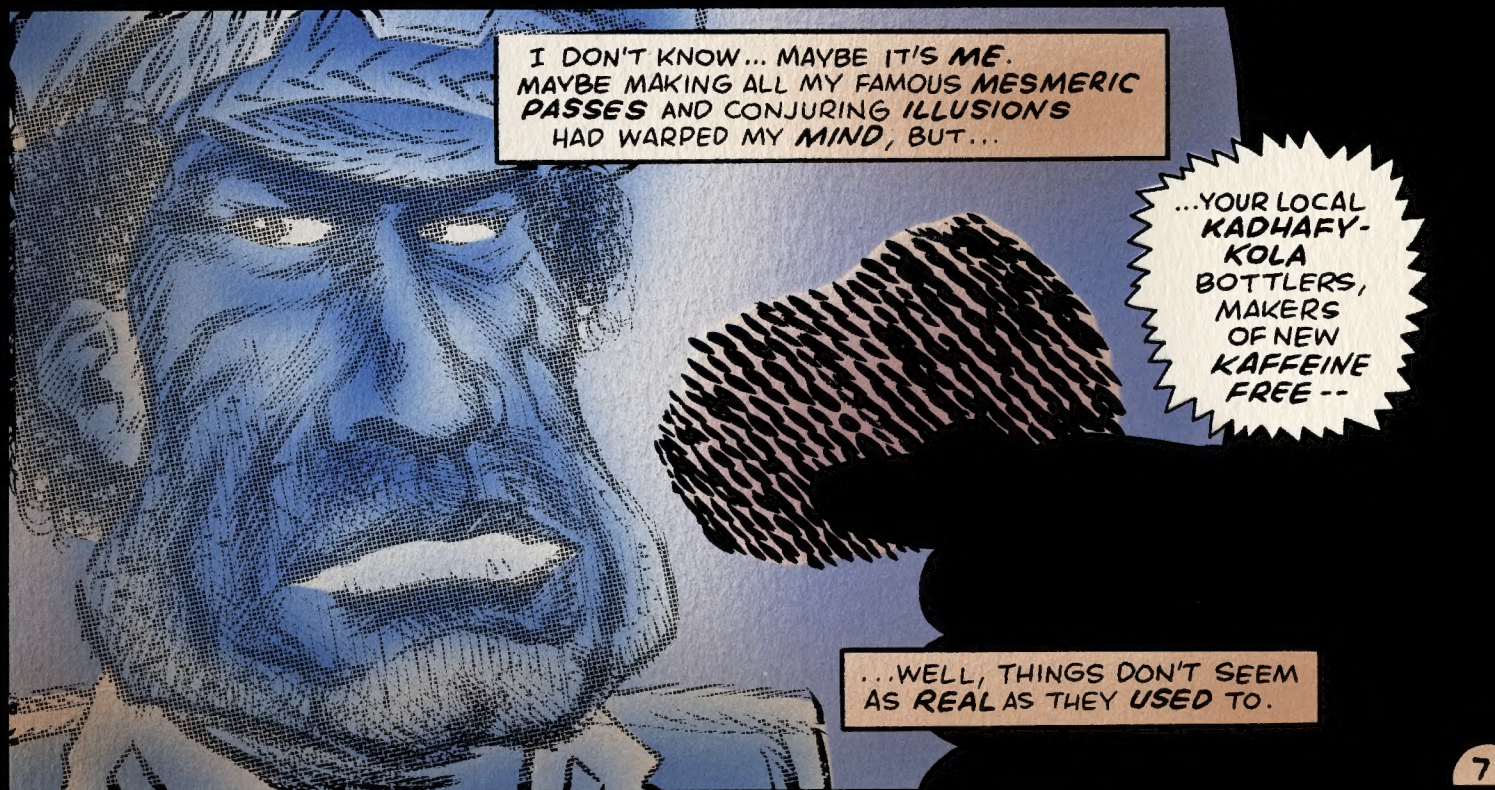
AT HOME, I WATCHED T.V. FOR A WHILE ... MOSTLY ELECTION NEWS DISCUSSING WHICH **POLITICAL CARICATURE** WAS THE CURRENT **FRONTRUNNER**.

**TEDDY ROOSEVELT** HAD STEPPED DOWN, LEAVING **NIXON** AND **HITLER** TO DUKE IT OUT BETWEEN THEM.



I DON'T KNOW ... MAYBE IT'S **ME**. MAYBE MAKING ALL MY FAMOUS **MESMERIC PASSES** AND **CONJURING ILLUSIONS** HAD **WARPED** MY **MIND**, BUT ...

...YOUR LOCAL **KADHAFY-KOLA** BOTTLERS, MAKERS OF NEW **KAFFEINE FREE** --



...WELL, THINGS DON'T SEEM AS REAL AS THEY USED TO.



BY LATE AFTERNOON, I BADLY NEEDED SOMETHING TO CONFIRM MY OBJECTIVE PHYSICAL STATUS.

1713

AFTER AN HOUR OF WRETCHED DELIBERATION, I WALKED DOWN TWO FLOORS AND STOOD OUTSIDE RED'S APARTMENT, DARING MYSELF TO KNOCK.

I DIDN'T HAVE TO. THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN AT THE FIRST TOUCH. ITS LOCK HAD BEEN FORCED.

MY IMPRESSIONS WERE CONFUSED ... DARKNESS, A WOMAN WHIMPERING QUIETLY, LEATHER GLISTENING IN THE SHADOWS, AND THEN ...

OKAY, SCUM... WHAT'S YOUR INTEREST?

YOU HER CUSTOMER?

HER PIMP?

YOU DRESS LIKE A PIMP.

AAK-- WHAT? N-NO. NO!

WE CAN CHECK ON THAT, CREEP! IN THE MEANTIME, MRS. DIMSTEAD IS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE.

SHE'S A PROSTITUTE. THE COURTS WOULD GIVE HER A CAUTION.

WE WON'T.

NOW GET OUT OUT HERE.

I AM NOT A BRAVE MAN. I BACKED OUT, STAMMERING, TERRIFIED, APOLOGIZING, TRYING NOT TO MEET RED'S TERRORIZED, PLEADING EYES ...

SHE KNEW. SHE KNEW WHY I'D COME TO VISIT HER.

A... A NEIGHBOR, UPSTAIRS...



17

THE PEOPLE IN HER ROOM HAD BEEN COSTUMED TYPES I DIDN'T KNOW. NEW PEOPLE.

FLEEING THE PRINCE FEATURES BUILDING, SICK WITH SHAME, I RESOLVED TO HELP RED, DOUBTING ALREADY THAT THIS WAS POSSIBLE.

PERHAPS FLYNN COULD ADVISE ME. RUNNING THROUGH THE DARKENING STREETS TOWARDS CAPT. BILLY'S. I SUFFERED AN IRRATIONAL DREAD THAT WHEN I TURNED THE CORNER, THE BAR WOULDN'T BE THERE ...

... BUT IT WAS.

INSIDE, EVERYBODY SEEMED NERVOUS AND SUBDUED WHEN I ASKED IF THEY'D SEEN FLYNN.

EVENTUALLY, CACTUS FACE (FROM ACE TRICKY INVESTIGATES) POINTED TO A CROWD STANDING IN THE CORNER.







I BARELY  
REMEMBER  
PUSHING MY  
WAY OUT INTO  
THE STREETS.

I FELT AS IF I  
WERE TRAPPED  
IN ONE OF LITTLE  
SAMMY SLEEPYHEAD'S  
NIGHTMARES.

I SUPPRESSED  
AN ABSURD URGE  
TO RUSH HOME  
AND WAKE HIM UP.

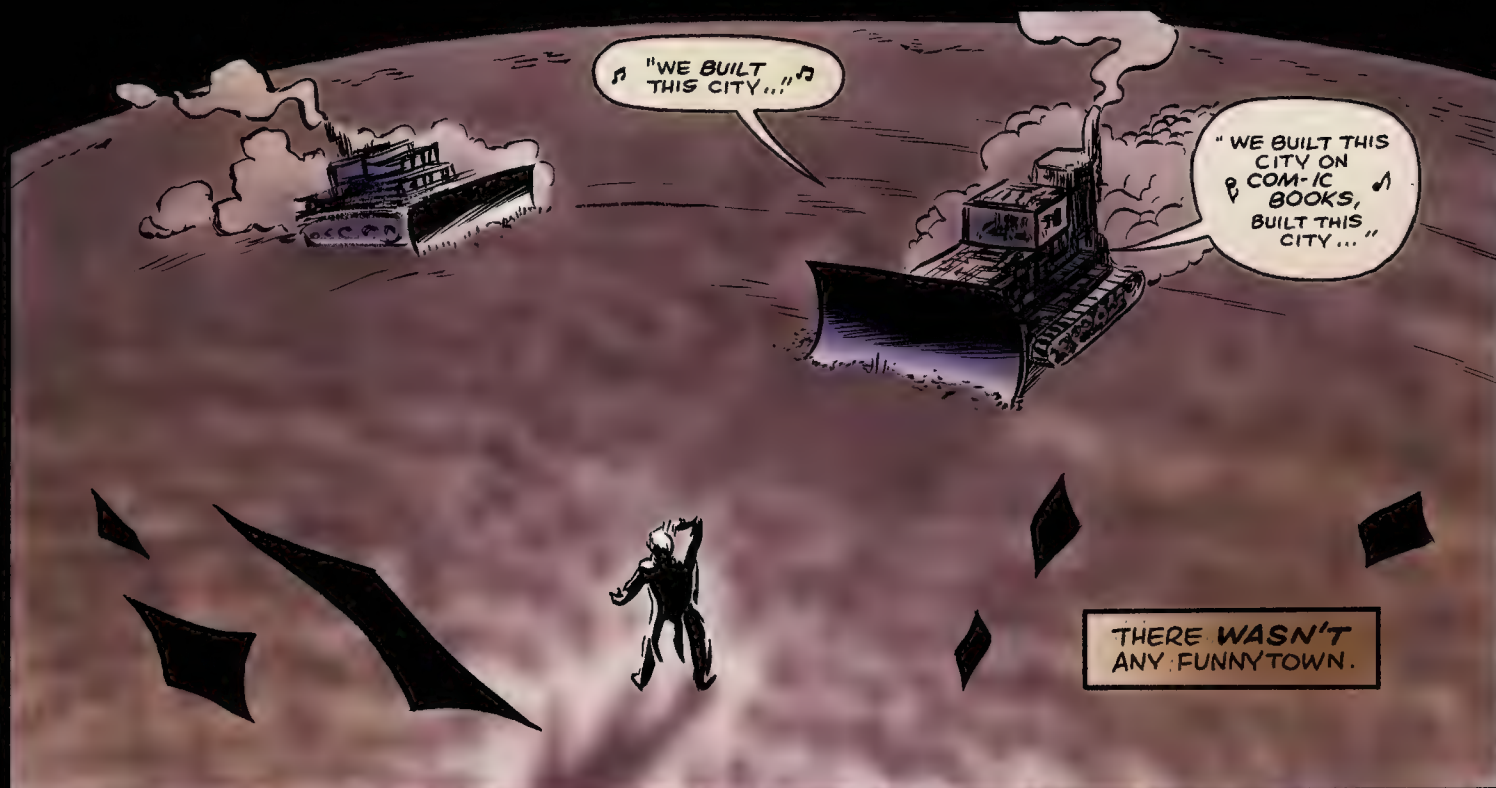
INSTEAD, I FOUND  
MYSELF HEADING  
TOWARDS *FUNNYTOWN*.

I WASN'T THINKING  
ABOUT HELPING RED  
OR LEARNING WHAT HAD  
HAPPENED TO FLYNN.

ALL I WANTED WAS  
*FUNNYTOWN*, AND  
ITS ENDLESS  
CONSOLATION.

BUT THERE  
WASN'T ANY  
CONSOLATION.

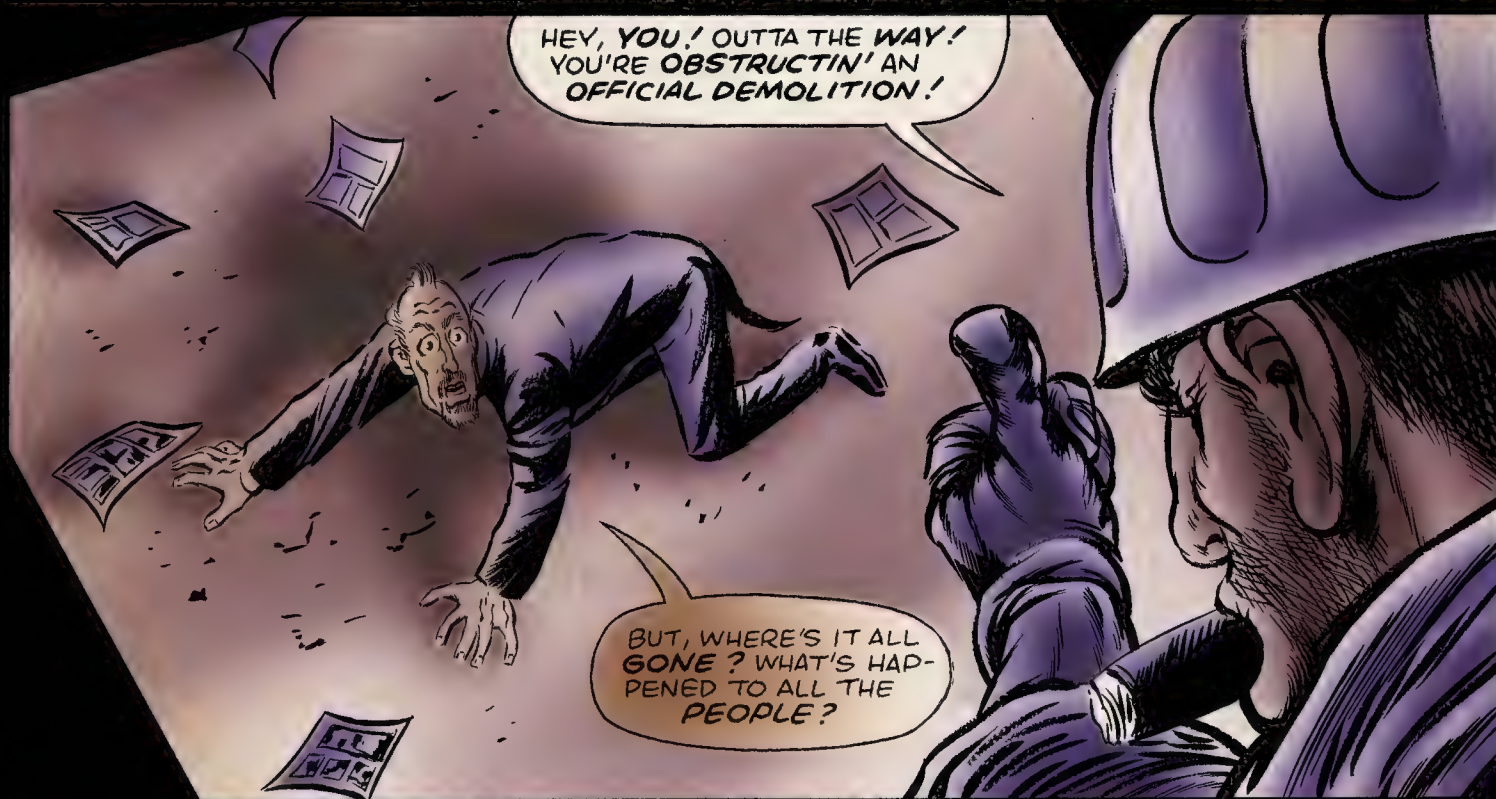




"WE BUILT  
THIS CITY..."

"WE BUILT THIS  
CITY ON  
COM-IC  
BOOKS,  
BUILT THIS  
CITY..."

THERE WASN'T  
ANY FUNNYTOWN.



HEY, YOU! OUTTA THE WAY!  
YOU'RE OBSTRUCTIN' AN  
OFFICIAL DEMOLITION!

BUT, WHERE'S IT ALL  
GONE? WHAT'S HAP-  
PENED TO ALL THE  
PEOPLE?



PEOPLE? THERE  
WEREN'T NO PEOPLE  
LIVIN' OUT HERE.  
JUST SOME STRAY  
DOGS AND STUFF.  
THEY'VE BEEN  
PAINLESSLY  
DESTROYED.

TAKE MY  
ADVICE, BUDDY,  
AN' KEEP OUT  
OF IT. THIS  
CITY'S CHANG-  
ING, AND SOME  
THINGS JUST  
DON'T FIT THE  
CONTINUITY  
NO MORE.



DAZED, I STUMBLED  
AWAY, IN THE DIRECTION  
OF THE PERIMETER  
FENCE, FEET SPLASHING  
ANKLE-DEEP IN OILY  
PUDDLES WITH DIRTY  
RAINBOW SLICKS.

I'VE BEEN STANDING  
HERE EVER SINCE,  
JUST WATCHING  
THE HORIZON WITH  
ITS CHURNING  
DARKNESS; ITS  
SMOLDERING,  
SULPHUROUS LIGHT.

IT'S NOT LIKE A  
STORMFRONT AT ALL,  
REALLY. IT'S MORE  
LIKE A VAST, CREEP-  
ING, **INDUSTRIAL**  
**MASS**, WREATHED  
IN FACTORY SMOKE  
AND LIT ONLY BY  
FURNACES.

SOMETIMES, IT LOOKS  
AS IF IT'S GETTING  
CLOSER...

... BUT THAT MAY BE  
AN **ILLUSION**, BORN  
OF THE **DISTANCE**..

END.



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A  
Publication  
of the  
Toonseum

ALAN MOORE DON SIMPSON

WITH PETER POPLASKI MIKE KAZALEH ERIC VINCENT

# IN PICTOPIA!







# NAME-DROPPING WHILE DROPPING THE NAME

A Foreword, Backword, or Sideways by Don Simpson

I think you'll agree this is the most bizarre edition of "In Pictopia" one could possibly imagine.

The story, perhaps one of the more highly-regarded and anthologized in the history of comics, appears here alone for the first time, not only without an anthology surrounding it, but even without The Author's name on the cover.

Indeed, the first appearance of "In Pictopia" was in an anthology. *Anything Goes*, as you might know by now, was an anthology series published by Fantagraphics Books to raise funds for their legal defense. In an interview in *The Comics Journal*, the "magazine of news and criticism" published by Fantagraphics, Harlan Ellison had described Michael Fleischer's work on *Jonah Hex* as "bugfuck," ostensibly a term of high praise coming from Ellison. Fleischer, however, felt he'd been libeled, and with the encouragement of much of the mainstream comic book industry that saw *TCJ* as a snarky pain in the ass, instigated a lawsuit against both Ellison and Fantagraphics, *TCJ*'s publisher.

Elsewhere in this edition, several of the key figures involved in the creation of "In Pictopia" recount the origin of the story, including myself, Mike Kazaleh, Pete Poplaski, Eric Vincent, Gary Groth, and even Denis Kitchen, the publisher of my series *Megaton Man* at the time—everyone except The Author of "In Pictopia." I won't reiterate that information here except to mention that I famously changed the title of the story, from The Author's word-centric "In Fictopia" to what I considered comics' more image-centric "In Pictopia" (spoiler alert: the alteration involved changing the "F" to a "P").

What I would like to do here (aside from helping round out a publication devoted to a thirteen-page comic book story with some filler material) is to discuss the story's strange publication history since *Anything Goes* #2 (December 1986), and the circumstances that have brought us to this very unusual edition.

As I mentioned, "In Pictopia" has always been highly-regarded—by comics critics, scholars, and

fans, many of whom I've met over the years. It's always been a favorite, it seems, among fans of The Author's work—even those who don't necessarily have any regard for my own work (*Megaton Man*, *Border Worlds*, *Bizarre Heroes*, and, under the pseudonym Anton Drek, *Wendy Whitebread*, *Undercover Slut* and *Forbidden Frankenstein*, the latter two having been printed in French, Spanish, Italian, and Finnish). "In Pictopia" made #92 on the "100 Best Comics of All Time" list published by the *Comics Journal* in 1999 (okay, perhaps an inside job). But you get the picture.

In short, "In Pictopia" has always had a special cachet in terms of my career. It's given me some "street cred." You can decide for yourself if that's merited.

In any case, after its initial appearance, which quickly went out of print, "In Pictopia" was anthologized for a second time in volume two of *The Best Comics of the Decade* (July 1990), a hardcover and paperback collection also published by Fantagraphics. This edition is noteworthy because the publisher made use of the exact same color separations, on film in those pre-digital days, as had been used to print *Anything Goes* #2, the main difference being the quality of paper stock (the comic book was printed on matte paper while the book collection was printed on glossy stock). Either edition, in my view, can be considered the benchmark, the gold standard, since both showed Eric Vincent's spectacular coloring of the story to equally excellent effect.

(If anything, the present edition should be even better, since Eric's original colored bluelines were scanned—remastered, as it were—and are presented here in larger format. Hopefully, this edition will represent The Authoritative version of the story from now on.)

The next time the story was anthologized was in 2003 in *The Extraordinary Works of...* well, I can't mention the full title, since it includes the name of The Author. This collection of The Author's works was published by TwoMorrrows. As I recall, the publisher had already obtained permission from The

**OPPOSITE:** Cover created for a proposed fundraising edition to accompany a gallery exhibit of the art for "In Pictopia," 2010.



Author for the project, and contacted me to obtain my permission, and to see if I still possessed the original art for use. I did indeed still have the art. They also informed me that The Author had generously forgone his own royalty so that the books' various artists could divvy up a bigger pot of proceeds. That was fine by me.

I agreed with the understanding that the story would be reproduced in black and white, and I sent the artwork to TwoMorrows. Imagine my surprise when I later received a box of complimentary copies of the published volume, and lo and behold, the art had been scanned all right, but the scans had been turned over to a digital colorist who completely recolored the story—apparently without reference to either of the original Fantagraphics versions with Eric's coloring, and executed with a very heavy Photoshop hand.

I'm sure the effort was a labor of love for the colorist, presumably a big fan of The Author's work. I have no idea what The Author thought of the job, although I assume he did not particularly care. What I want to stress, however, is that this recoloring was done behind my back, without my authorization, and without my approval. I haven't looked at it in a while, but I remember it being very purple and impasto, and very nearly ruining the story, in my view.

As far as I was concerned, the people who put together *The Extraordinary Works of...* had made an agreement with me and broken it. I suppose they thought of "In Pictopia" as The Author's Work, and as long as we have the permission of The Author, who cares what some dumb artist thinks?

In 2010, "In Pictopia" was almost published again. The occasion was an exhibition of the thirteen pages of original art, along with selections of art from my other published works, held in the fall of that year at the non-profit Toonseum in downtown Pittsburgh. For the occasion, I recreated the "In Pictopia" logo in Adobe Illustrator for a spiffy refrigerator magnet that was issued by the gallery to promote the opening. Also, the board of directors of the Toonseum approached me about issuing a special commemorative comic of "In Pictopia," featuring the story in black and white, as a fundraising mechanism for the gallery.

I contacted The Author to obtain his blessing for the project. I should backtrack here and mention, since we're dropping names, that I did meet The Author once, at the 1985 San Diego Comic-Con. There, I showed him copies of my parody of his work on *Swamp Thing* in *Megaton Man* #6, and he revealed to me that he had, in his words, "ripped off *Megaton Man*, well, sort of" in the form of the

nuclear-powered Dr. Manhattan, for his upcoming project, *Watchmen*. Indeed, a scene in *Watchmen* #4 (DC Comics, December 1986) features the doctor and the Silk Spectre going "On Patrol" atop a big-city skyline, closely mimicking a scene of Megaton Man and the See-Thru Girl doing likewise in *Megaton Man* #4 (Kitchen Sink Press, June 1985)—I suppose since the original was a parody, The Author's version was the first "un-parody" in the history of comics.

It was sometime after that fabled in-person meeting that I drew "In Pictopia," and years after that, during the production of 1963 for Image Comics in 1993, that I had a brief transatlantic call with The Author. I suggested to "Affable [Author]" that I be credited as "Dandy Don" over his "Dubious Don" (we were all to assume Marvel Bullpen nicknames for the duration). He jovially replied I could call myself whatever I wanted, since I was the letterer. To this day, those have been my only fleeting direct communications with The Author.

By 2010, however, anyone who wished to get in touch with The Author had to go through an American intermediary (did I mention The Author lives in England?), in this case, Chris Staros. I succeeded, and word came back that the Toonseum fundraising edition of "In Pictopia" could proceed. I contacted Mike, Pete, Eric, Gary, and Denis to compile a text of their reminiscences with exhibition curator John Mattie (the resulting document is published in this volume for the first time). I also drew a new cover for the story—it had never had a cover, and I had never drawn any of the characters outside of the story before. The gallery printed up a postcard of the colored art with my Illustrator logo, along with the slug line "A Publication of the Toonseum." Mind you, everyone contributing to the project was working for free, including myself.

However—and astonishingly—the Toonseum never followed up, and "In Pictopia" as a stand-alone comic was never published. Presumably, some expected donation that was to have covered printing costs never materialized, but that is only a guess; to this day, I've never received any form of acknowledgement, explanation, or apology from the gallery—the project simply never happened. The exhibition closed and the comic was never mentioned again.

Mind you, such a publication of "In Pictopia" might have represented a virtually unlimited and exclusive license to print money in perpetuity, at least providing a modest stream of revenue. But it never happened. The fridge magnet and the postcard, the only two authorized "In Pictopia" collectibles, are all that came out of the project. Perhaps it's not surprising that, given such fiscal acumen, the gallery was shuttered in February 2018, and the Toonseum remains in a "curtains drawn" state, whatever that means.

But the print world was not through with "In Pictopia"—not by a longshot.

In 2017, a publisher named Critical Cartoons approached me about including "In Pictopia" in *Brighter than You Think*, yet another anthology of The Author's shorter works, and the fourth anthologization of the story. Same deal as before—The Author had graciously volunteered to forego any royalty so that the artists (me, Mike, Pete, and Eric) could split a bigger pot. This time, I insisted that I scan the artwork myself and that it appear in black and white (since they weren't talking color), and the publisher agreed.

Business card promoting a 2010 Pittsburgh Cultural District gallery exhibit of the original "In Pictopia" art.





However, the publisher apparently changed their minds. After I went to the trouble of locating the artwork in storage, I never received further instructions to make scans. Instead, Critical Comics merely scanned a copy of one of the Fantagraphics editions (I assume *Anything Goes* #2), and not particularly well. The printed results were less than optimal and for the most part barely legible. The reproduction of Eric Vincent's coloring was so dark in places that captions and dialogue are almost impossible to make out. And this was after destroying the first printing and going back to press to supposedly correct the problem.

I was beginning to think "In Pictopia" was cursed. For, it seemed to me, publishers would obtain the permission of The Author, then contact me, promise to follow whatever instructions I dictated, then completely ignore my instructions and do whatever they damn well pleased. After all, what does some prima donna comic book artist know? He's not The Author.

So, when an Italian publisher contacted me in 2019 to include "In Pictopia" in an "All-[Author] Issue" of their monthly magazine, I politely told them (not in so many words) that if The Author granted them permission to reproduce the story, I wouldn't stand in the way. However, I would not provide scans of the original art nor offer any other assistance, since any stipulations or instructions or advice I could possibly offer would only be ignored. And if they didn't like it, they could go hang. They were on their own. I never received a follow-up, but I haven't heard any more about the "All-[Author] Issue" from this publisher.

I discussed on Facebook the exasperating experiences I had had, post-Fantagraphics, serving as the de facto executor of "In Pictopia" in the twenty-first century. To my surprise, Gary Groth, of all people, contacted me. He said Fantagraphics would be willing to put out the definitive edition of "In Pictopia"—in fact, the edition you are holding in your hands.

This seemed to me like a no-brainer, and I readily agreed. But it turned out to be only the beginning of my sorrows.

It was left to me to once again contact The Author, this time through a different third-party emissary, one with the word "stupid" appearing in his email address, twice. When word came back, same deal as before—The Author generously would forego any royalty so that the artists would have a bigger pot to split. But there was one caveat.

The Author would rather not have his name on the story.

I wondered why, of all things, The Author would make such a request after two lousy reprintings of "In Pictopia" and one no-show, especially when the original publisher of the story, the one that had done such a good job in the first place, was willing to step in.

Did I mention I had my own career in comics, and continue to have my own life to run?

It seemed The Author of "In Pictopia" had developed some kind of problem with Fantagraphics, and conveyed to me he would rather not want his name associated with the imprint.

I can't describe my reaction at the time except to say that I was astonished and greatly insulted. Taking one's name off of a story was an action usually reserved for when a work had been adulterated or compromised to such an extent that it no longer represented The Author's vision. It was a tactic Harlan Ellison, for example, was well known for, having



Cover of *Bizarre Heroes* #14 (Fiasco Comics Inc., October 1995).

exercised it in the case of several TV episodes and other projects.

Of course, by 2019 The Author had already made a name for himself—if you'll excuse the play on words—for taking his name off of TV shows and movies based on his work, too, such as the current *Watchmen*. But how could The Author of "In Pictopia" claim his vision had been compromised in this case of a definitive "In Pictopia," scanned from the original colored bluelines created in 1986?

Turns out, or so he conveyed to me in a later email, The Author had taken exception to something written about him in an interview published in *The Comics Journal*.

Wait—hadn't Michael Fleischer already done that?

I'm not going to attempt to characterize here what I take to be The Author's motivations. I would like to say I respected his decision, but this could only be true so far as I comprehend his decision, which I don't at all. After all, everyone in comics knows who The Author of "In Pictopia" is (if not, they can easily find out). And everyone is intelligent enough to understand the message it would send about me personally—an innocent bystander in all this.

I will remark that I find it an odd conflation—we have the old Ellisonian trick of taking one's name off a story coupled with the hackneyed Fleischerian saw of taking offense at something written in *The Comics Journal*. Unoriginal? Surreptitious plagiarism? You decide. In any case, "In Pictopia" seems to have come full circle. That's as much sense as I can make of it.

We had also planned to include The Author's original typescript of "In Fictopia," so let me say a word or two on that.

As I believe I say elsewhere in this volume, I recalled the original script for "In Fictopia" as being quite long and dense. I say recalled because I could not remember when I had last seen the script. I had been sent the script—a photocopy—by Gary at Fantagraphics in 1986, and I distinctly remember at one



time having kept the script in a Fantagraphics envelope (a white one with a Jaime Hernandez drawing of Maggie Chascarillo in blue, with “[Author] scripts” scrawled on it in Sharpie). That’s scripts, plural, because I also kept a copy of “Convention Tension” in the same envelope. The latter is a plot synopsis by The Author originally intended to have been illustrated by Gary Kwapisz but had been pitched to me for a later issue of *Anything Goes*. “Convention Tension” obviously was never realized, although I still have the plot and the envelope. But not the script to “In Pictopia.”

Brief side note: “Convention Tension” involved an apocalyptic comic book convention that, if anything, would have formed a counterpart to “In Pictopia.” If “In Pictopia” concerned an allegorical city of comic strip and comic book characters, “Convention Tension” was a bleak comedy about the current industry of characters driven by ruthless ambition, petty grievances, and life-long grudges. One of the main characters is named Byron Starkwinter, a writer who achieves fame with his creation “Mookie the Worm,” but because of incessant fan adulation and no small amount of psychoactive chemicals, eventually becomes unhinged and unable to separate fantasy from reality. I mention this only in passing.

Getting back to “In Pictopia,” as I say, I have long wondered whatever became of my copy of the script. Could I have been so callous not only to have changed the “F” to a “P” in the title, but to simply have discarded the script after I finished drawing the story?

By some miracle, Anthony F. Smith located my copy of the script in the same trove of materials amassed in which Eric Vincent’s colored bluelines resided all these years. Anthony was Eric Vincent’s collaborator on *Alien Fire* (a short-lived but highly-regarded science fiction comic book series published by Kitchen Sink Press contemporaneously with my own *Border Worlds*). Apparently, I had forwarded my copy of the “In Pictopia” script to Eric, along with a note on Kitchen Sink Press stationery, to enable Eric to savor the prose stylings of The Author and to offer hints as to the emotional mood his coloring should shoot for. The strategy apparently worked, and Eric subsequently deposited both the script and his original colored bluelines with Anthony (although Anthony informs me the two sets of documents were by no means contiguous among the forty banker’s boxes of original scripts, memorabilia, and other ephemera he’s amassed from the world of comics).

Now with perhaps the only extant copy of the script located, I contacted The Author one last time in the summer of 2020, pleading with him to reconsider removing his name from the story, and to seek his permission to reprint the original “In Fictopia” script along with the “In Pictopia” comic (I would have thrown “Convention Tension” into the mix if the response had been affirmative). He politely declined.

What the script would have proven is only what I’d been saying for thirty-four years—that illustrating “In Pictopia” forever ruined me as a comic book freelancer. As I believe I say elsewhere, all other comic book scripts I’ve illustrated by comparison (or just on their own) amount to barely schematic recipes—close up, longshot, caption, sound effect, dialogue—for dishes one knows one is not supposed to be cooking or baking. Such scripts have to be read five times just to get the gist of the story (or at least I have to read them five or six times, being so dense),

whereas the script for “In Fictopia” included such detailed emotional, psychological, and philosophical notes...

In short, you’ll never know how bad a job I did rendering “In Pictopia.”

Instead of “In Fictopia”—the words—you’ll just have to settle for “In Pictopia”—the words as I scrawled them by hand, and the images as we drew them. Instead of a planned celebration of the underlying fiction, we have a lavish celebration of the pictures, one that is more than a little bit embarrassing to me personally, since it’s my old stuff (as Keith Pollard once said of inker Joe Sinnott, “Somehow, he turns my pencils into art!” I feel the same way about Mike, Pete, and especially Eric’s contributions). In any case, my alteration of title, as far as this edition is concerned, turns out to have been prophetic.

Let me close by saying that I’m well aware that, by proceeding with this unusual edition of “In Pictopia”—perhaps its last appearance in any form—without the name of the Author of “In Pictopia” on the cover—will seem like an act of crass opportunism, even though the only opportunity I see is for Fantagraphics to lose money. Ardent fans of The Author will surely class me with The Author’s other perceived enemies—evil comic book publishers, evil Hollywood studios, evil former collaborators of his on the make, and all other denizens who still reside in the Plato’s Cave of comics.

I’m prepared for the blowback mostly because, at this point, I really don’t care. It was an honor to have drawn “In Pictopia,” and it is a work I’m exceedingly proud of. It has also been a great learning experience, then and since. I didn’t do it for the money, and money has never been a motivation for me to see it remain in print. We’ve earned a small amount of money from it over the years, and I still have the fridge magnet on my refrigerator. But other than that, serving as the de facto executor of “In Pictopia” has been something of a thankless job, and not the best use of my time. It’s been at least as exasperating as it has been rewarding.

I want to thank Gary Groth for publishing this edition, and Mike, Pete, Eric, Denis, and Anthony for their invaluable contributions. Finally, I want to thank The Author of “In Pictopia,” who at least gave his blessing for this edition to go forward, albeit without his name on the cover.

Now, finally, I can drop it.

DON SIMPSON  
Somewhere in Pictopialand  
August 2020





# RETURN TO FUNNYTOWN

Or: How We Made Everyone's Favorite Rarely-Seen but Critically Acclaimed Graphic Novella Without Really Trying

Most of the principal participants in the creation and publishing of "In Pictopia" (except for *The Author*) here provide an "oral history"—their best recollections after over a quarter of a century—of the curious confluence of circumstances surrounding the strip's creation in the spring of 1986. Credit lines include what each person contributed directly to the strip as well as generally describe what else each would have been doing at the time. These reminiscences were assembled in August 2010.

**GARY GROTH, PUBLISHER, ANYTHING GOES #2 ("IN PICTOPIA"); THE COMICS JOURNAL; CAP'N JACK; LOVE & ROCKETS:**

The comic book writer Michael Fleischer sued *The Comics Journal*, Harlan Ellison, and me for libel and defamation of character in 1980. He took offense at comments made about him by Ellison in an

interview I conducted. In An Ellisonian attempt to praise his work, Ellison referred to him as "crazy as a bed bug" and compared him to Robert E. Howard and H.R. Giger, who he referred to, respectively, as "a very sick person" and "a nut case." Fleischer was neither flattered nor amused and filed suit. The lawsuit against us dragged on for seven years—with literally thousands of pages of depositions, motions, counter motions, etc. generated during that time, as well as much behind the scenes drama, craziness, and treachery—until it ended in a four week jury trial in the Southern District (Federal) Court of New York. (The plaintiffs—me, Ellison, *The Comics Journal*—won on all counts.) But by 1984, after four years of intense litigation—Fleischer's lawyer reminded me of Jimmy Stewart from *Anatomy of a Murder*, plodding but relentless—we were in dire need of help to pay our legal expenses (which ultimately cost over \$200,000—real money in the 1980s).

The lawsuit itself had polarized the comics industry. There was, on one side, a sizeable faction of comics professionals who were rooting for Fleischer to win and bankrupt us; there was also, on the other side, many artists who were entirely supportive of us and wished us to prevail. (Naturally, there were those who couldn't care less or who wanted to stay as far from it as possible.) At one convention in New York City, circa 1983-4, Fleischer actually gathered a dozen professionals together—including [Marvel Comics editor-in-chief] Jim Shooter, [artists] Howard Chaykin, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Bob Layton, among others—to do sketches that were sold with all proceeds going to his lawyer so that he could continue suing us. I discovered this "event" the previous evening by accident when the con's organizer, Phil Seuling, somewhat sheepishly told me that he had given them space to do this (he had, he said, given them permission to do this because he'd mistakenly thought that it was a pro-*Comics Journal* rally, and couldn't, when he realized his mistake, take it back). I demanded equal space in the same room, which he reluctantly gave me. This meant that I had

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A Hell-Raising Interview with  
**HARLAN ELLISON**



What's right (and wrong) with comics, TV,  
literature – and the way we live

**LEFT:** The interview with Harlan Ellison that started it all: Michael Fleischer's \$2 million lawsuit against *The Comics Journal*, *The Comics Journal* Legal Defense Fund, the *Anything Goes* benefit comic in which "In Pictopia" appeared. *The Comics Journal* #53, Winter 1980.



OH, MAMA!  
MELTED  
CHEESE!!

ALAN MOORE • DON SIMPSON

# "In Pictopia"

WITH  
MIKE KAZALEH  
PETE POPLASKI • ERIC VINCENT

1986





about four-five hours of the evening left to assemble my own loyalists; I quickly lashed together artists who would sit on the opposite side of the same small room doing sketches for “our” side, willing to subject themselves to one of the most poisonous social circumstances I’ve ever been a part of. I will be eternally grateful to the artists who agreed to support me: Gil Kane, Art Spiegelman, Mike Kaluta, and Burne Hogarth. I will never forget the image of Maurice Horn —what was the historian *Maurice Horn* doing there?—standing between the tables lining opposite sides of the room, screaming imprecations at us in French (he too evidently wanted to see us put out of business). After a few hours of this toxic “event,” Seuling shut the whole room down and asked us all to leave —it was, he said, ruining the atmosphere of his entire convention. He was quite right.



There were, as I said, many well-wishers who felt strongly that *The Comics Journal* served an important function and that, moreover, there was an important 1st Amendment issue at stake. Our business insurance paid a substantial portion of our legal bills, but the remaining 20-25% of cash we needed to supplement the insurance was too much for our shoe-string operation to sustain. This was also before the creation of The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, though considering how useless they were helping us defend against a libel suit in 2006 it is doubtful they would’ve been helpful in this earlier one. either So, I decided our only option was to go into the fund-raising business, and came up with the idea of a benefit comic, all profits of which would be placed in a Defense Fund bank account and used to pay our legal expenses. I would basically beg artists and writers and letterers and colorists and other creative types to contribute to it free. I became quite good at this and, solicited contributions from many creators we published, as well as creators that I’d befriended or otherwise knew. It is still humbling to realize how many creators came through with contributions drawn especially for the six issues of the comic I put

together or let us use pre-existing but unpublished work. It’s a long list, but includes friends, acquaintances, strangers, and sparring partners like [cartoonists] Frank Miller, Dave Sim, Gil Kane, Jack Kirby, Dan Clowes, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez, and many other generous souls.

One writer I’d asked to contribute was Alan Moore, who was then by far the best writer working for mainstream comics and, as I recall, somewhat bristling at the editorial restrictions imposed upon him by DC Comics, for whom he wrote *Swamp Thing*. This was an opportunity to do anything he wanted, without editorial interference—and he sent me the script “In Fictopia” (which Don Simpson) wisely changed to “In Pictopia.” As I recall, the script was a dazzling piece of work in and of itself — Moore provided as much detail for panel content and composition as Shaw did stage sets and directions.

Once Alan provided the script, I had to find someone to draw it, an editorial chore I was neither comfortable with nor particularly good at. All of our comics were written and drawn by one person—the cartoonist; we didn’t split chores up among writers, pencilers, inkers, etc., an assembly line approach, in fact, that we frowned upon. I forget how I came to approach Don. My best guess is that I thought Don was a skillful cartoonist working on material that was beneath him (*Megaton Man*), but that he had the chops and the satirical instinct and, let’s face it, the youthful chutzpah to pull it off. I’m not sure how well I actually knew Don at the time—we may have met and hung out at conventions. I must’ve known him at least casually, though. At that point, Don was sullen, resentful, and smart—a lethal combination. And I say that with some fondness because I’m sure I embodied similar traits to some extent, which may be why we have gotten along or at least tolerated each other all these years. If I remember correctly, Don expanded the strip by four or five pages to accommodate the sheer expanse of Alan’s writing—which was fine by me because it meant four or five more free pages and a few hundred more bucks to our lawyer.

I believe Don recruited Mike Kazaleh and Pete Poplaski to help with drawing some of the strip, and I approached Eric Vincent to color it. Eric was part of what I referred to as the “Dallas Mafia,” which included [artist and philosopher] Ken Smith, [illustrator] Don Punchatz, [artist] Pat Boyette, and [underground cartoonist and artist] Jack Jackson (the last did not live in Dallas, but was an honorary member due to his Texan roots)—a fine and cheerfully cantankerous bunch with whom I’d get together every year at the Dallas Fantasy Fair. Eric was a skilful painter who was coloring the line drawings by Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez for the covers of our *Love & Rockets* collections; I knew he could do the job. He signed on. (My criteria for pulling everyone together was basically stylistic appropriateness, skill, and youth—we were all around the same age, early-to-mid-20s, didn’t have families and onerous financial responsibilities, and had the leisure time to work on a great project for free.)

I was knocked out by what Don delivered. I remember thinking at the time that it was too good for a benefit book! Don will hate me for saying this, but I think it’s one of the greatest—if not the best—thing he’s ever done in comics. I haven’t read it in years, but Alan’s script is skillfully controlled, human, warm, elegiac, intellectually engaged and

**LEFT:** *Anything Goes!* #2, December 1986, in which “In Pictopia” appeared. Published by *The Comics Journal*. **OPPOSITE:** Unpublished private art commission.



conceptually resonant—and, as a whole, once the words and pictures all came together, a lovely, even exquisitely perfect and seamless piece of work. “In Pictopia” turned out to be one of those serendipitous creative confluences that occur too rarely in one’s life, and I’m pleased that my miserable and unfortunate circumstance could serve as a catalyst.

My continued gratitude to everyone involved in pulling off this small masterpiece.



**MIKE KAZALEH, PENCILER, “FUNNYTOWN” SEQUENCE, “IN PICTOPIA”; CREATOR, CAP’N JACK:**

It all started back in the eighties when comic book writer Michael Fleischer was suing Gary Groth. If I remember correctly, the suit was because Gary Groth, co-founder of Fantagraphics Books and editor of *The Comics Journal*, had printed an interview in his magazine where Harlan Ellison had said something not nice about Michael. To help pay for their legal defense, Fantagraphics Books published a short series of comic books called *Anything Goes*. Because this was a benefit book drawn during simpler times, no contracts were signed, and no money changed hands. It was in this comic that “In Pictopia” first appeared.

The story was written by Alan Moore. My good friend Donald Simpson was to draw the pictures. He’d asked Pete Poplaski to pencil in some of the old timey comic strip characters, and me to pencil in the funny animals. The whole story was inked by Don. Don and I had gone to school together back in Michigan, but we were living in separate towns by this time. I penciled my bits onto Bristol board, then mailed the art to Don for finishing.

I remember reading the script as written by Mr. Moore. It was typewritten. He went into a lot of detail describing the scene in each panel. It wasn’t so much that there was to be a ton of detail in each illustration, but the long description did give you a good idea about the mood of the drawing.

The coloring was done with a system called “blue-line.” This system allowed the color to be painted separately, and it would later be combined with the line art. This gave you full color while retaining the crisp solid line of the original brush and ink drawing. I recall seeing Eric Vincent’s blue-line paintings over at Fantagraphics. I was very impressed and delighted at the way he was able to capture the feel of old, brittle newsprint. It was completely appropriate for the story.

Overall, I thought the story came out quite good. It said what a lot of us were feeling at the time about how all the fun in comics was being replaced by something nastier. I hope the fun will come back someday.

**PETE POPLASKI, PENCILER, BAR ROOM BACKGROUNDS, “IN PICTOPIA”; COVER COLORIST, MEGATON MAN; EDITOR, STEVE CANYON MAGAZINE:**

“If you have to choose between the truth and the legend, print the legend!” I remember it as if it were 24 minutes ago. I was late as usual, about two months late, behind in my deadline for *Steve Canyon* #14, at least a week behind on coloring a *Spirit* cover for Uncle Will [Eisner], and all over my floor were scattered paste-up scraps for reconfiguring 1954 Milton Caniff strips into the *Steve Canyon* 3-D comic (I used the floor a lot).

Don was working like an octopus in the next office trying to break “the Kirby Barrier” (drawing four finished comic pages a day) writing, penciling, inking, and coloring *Megaton Man* and [the] *Border Worlds* [back-up feature for *Megaton Man*]. On top of all that he had accepted the opportunity to work with Alan Moore on a short comic story as soon as he received the script. I heard a loud laugh from the next room. Don kicked in my studio office door brandishing his Alan Moore script around in the air and said I had to help him knock it out immediately. He yelled he had to do it and I had to help him do it. I read the script and thought, “oh yeah, crowd scenes ...that will take some time to figure out...and you ain’t got much of that!” So I agreed to help out. It was a challenge. I dropped everything (except Kitchen Sink Press’s high standards of quality which was always my reason for missing practically every deadline I



**ABOVE:** Cover of Mike Kazaleh’s *Adventures of Captain Jack* #1, January 1986, Fantagraphics.

**RIGHT:** Self portrait by Pete Poplaski, from *Sketchbook Adventures of Peter Poplaski*, 2012, Boom Entertainment.





ever had), and Don hit the drawing board blocking out his rough ideas based on Alan Moore's lengthy stage directions. He handed me a page to structure a crowd perspective of burned out comic characters.

Now working on this "In Pictopia" project in the "Post-Silver" era of comics was very much akin to the legendary tales told about how many of the great old 52-page "Golden Age" comics from the 1940s were created spontaneously on the spot. So, just like *Marvel Mystery* #2 (I never had that ish) with the original Human Torch battling it out with the Sub-Mariner, fire versus water, there was Don Simpson playing Carl Burgos at the kitchen table drawing the Human Torch, and there was I, being Bill Everett, sitting in the bathtub drawing the Sub-Mariner pages! And so, with great determination, along with mass quantities of caffeine unstabling our molecules, we willfully approached the "Kirby Barrier." It was quite an ambitious thing to attempt because of the high standards set by the hilarious and miraculous performances of Wally Wood and Will Elder in the old *Mad* magazine, counterfeiting all the drawing styles of different cartoon characters, like for example, Wally Wood's double-pager of famous comic strip characters in an old folks home. Great stuff! Don and I stuck to our drawing boards day and night, bleary eyed and with a bad cigarette-like taste forming in our mouths even though neither of us smoked, into the endless early hours of the morn, grinding it out.

There were other Alan Moore scripts or concepts that Don was enthusiastic about, one of which was a "Mad Fan With A Gun" scenario [an unrealized plot synopsis known as "Convention Tension" proffered by Gary Groth]. It reminded me of the scene from Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* in which a fan comes up to Woody and says, "I always loved you!" And he pulls a revolver out and fires point blank. The locale was changed to a comic convention and had a Jean-Paul Sartre "No Exit" edge to it. Anyway, I don't think you could say Don and I broke the "Kirby Barrier" with the "In Pictopia" pages, but we may have scratched it a little bit. He and I returned to our regular projects after the weekend without any noticeable dip in Kitchen Sink Press stock options occurring.

"In Pictopia" was well received. Less than two decades later I was handed my own eighteen page Alan Moore script for the lucky thirteenth issue of *Tom Strong*, for which I was asked to illustrate the concluding six-page chapter in a sort of period C. C. Beck *Captain Marvel* cartoon style. It was fun. But the kids

these days, I'm tellin' ya, these kids will never know the glory of them "Post-Silver Age" days in comics. Nev-ver! "Nuff said!"

## ERIC VINCENT, COLORIST, "IN PICTOPIA"; ARTIST, *ALIEN FIRE*

I don't remember how I came to be attached to this project—I had met Gary Groth at Sensei Kenneth Smith's house when Anthony Smith and I came to pitch our Alien Fire project at that year's Dallas Con. Gary is desperately allergic to cats, and Anthony and I mistook his exposure and subsequent catatonia to Doc's very hairy feline as his editorial response to our project. With every orifice swollen shut, it's small wonder he had nothing to say to us. We were deeply disappointed—we admired the work Gary was doing even though we were suspicious comics didn't deserve the enormous intellectual effort he was willing to invest in them. Fantagraphics' SF title *Dalgoda* was in the works and Kenneth Smith eventually would grace Dennis Fujitake's *Dalgoda* pages with his luscious coloring. SF had always been poison for comics publishers, so we hoped that if Gary was crazy enough to do one book, he could do two and add us to his roster. Now, I don't know the state of Denis Kitchen's immune system, but with no cats about he was able to speak to us that weekend and eventually gave us our big chance.

Don I met later at some Con after he had been knocking out *Megaton Man* books for some time, and I got to see jaw-dropping pages for his upcoming *Border Worlds* series. I could have wept for what I knew was going to be lost from those originals to the printed page. There were few comic artists for whom I felt pangs of jealousy, but Don's draughtsmanship, fluid brushwork and anatomical knowledge were well worth envying.

What I mainly remember is that script from Alan Moore. How could an artist not respond with his best to this kind of writing? And, this great script was embedded in a stream-of-consciousness flow of



TOP LEFT: Portrait of Zorro by Pete Poplaski, from *Sketchbook Adventures of Peter Poplaski*, 2012, Boom Entertainment.

LEFT: *Alien Fire* #2 by Anthony F. Smith and Eric Vincent, May 1987, Kitchen Sink Press.



directions, ideas, images and reference that allowed you to see the inner workings of Alan's mind. Who else but Alan would provide pages of text describing a single panel? As the artist, Don could wade into this rush of thought for whatever inspirations he needed, or to stimulate his own search for source material.

I really enjoyed working out the color schemes for the various neighborhoods of "In Pictopia." For the "Mandrake the Magician" type character—Nocturno the Necromancer—who relates the story, I used purples and browns to suggest the decomposing stock of newsprint, the last holdout of the great comic characters of the past.

The Funny Animal neighborhood next to Nocturno's district would be only a little better—Gladstone was still doing reprints of Disney comics at the time and there has always been a big interest in Donald Duck in Europe, not to mention the airing of old cartoons on TV—so I gave them a muted palette a little more attention/money could finance, though one still showing the ravages of sulfur on cheap pulp paper.

As a Golden Age superhero, Flexible Flynn is looking pretty rough, but he still has white in his word balloons—he's still marginally "hip"—while Nocturno's text shows his age. As the magician explains, it is the contemporary superhero that enjoys the high production values that their popularity can finance. Overdeveloped physically and hypersexual, these cruel, arrogant monsters have the garish, almost primary color palette that, color-wise, demonstrates their brutal, simple-minded attitude towards justice—something we see in action when Nocturno walks in on several superheroes terrorizing Red, a down-on-her-luck adventure comics character living in the same building.

As a side note, I was still using my old Pasché airbrush at the time, which was a spray gun compared to the Iwata airbrushes I use now. I could have done a much better job with these babies.

This story would have made a great series, and you can see some of the ideas here that Alan went on

to develop further in The Watchmen series. I enjoyed doing it, and am glad the money that was raised helped Fantagraphics with the Ellison/Fleischer mess that grew out of an interview Ellison gave in *The Comics Journal*.

**DENIS KITCHEN, PUBLISHER OF MEGATON MAN, BORDER WORLDS, ALIEN FIRE, THE SPIRIT, AND STEVE CANYON MAGAZINE; FOUNDER, COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND:**

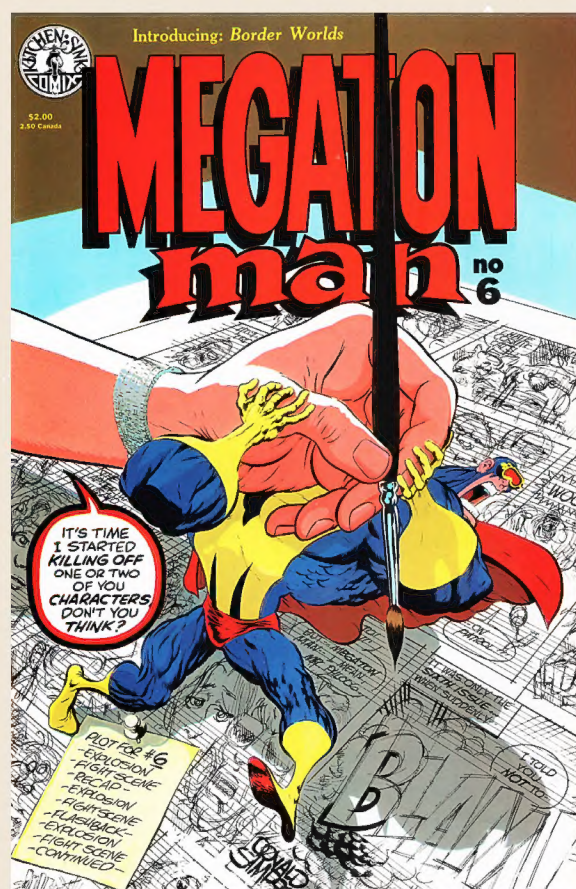
When Don had the opportunity to illustrate Alan Moore's "In Pictopia," he was working out of the Kitchen Sink Press complex in rural Wisconsin. My first reaction was negative. I didn't want him to fall behind on *Megaton Man*, an important title for KSP at the time. I was also not thrilled that my rival publisher Fantagraphics was getting a foot in the door with Don. But whatever my misgivings, when I saw the finished results, I was truly impressed. "In Pictopia" is my favorite Simpson comic and a highlight of the medium for this era.

**DON SIMPSON, PENCILER, INKER, LETTERER, "IN PICTOPIA"; CREATOR, MEGATON MAN AND BORDER WORLDS:**

Thank God printed comics have dates, or I wouldn't quite know where to place "In Pictopia" in my *oeuvre*. Judging from the date, I was probably in between *Megaton Man* #8 and #9, which meant I was pretty much wrapping up the satirical color comic's ten-issue run, and preparing to embark on the somber black-and-white series *Border Worlds*, which would form part of an ill-fated science fiction line along with Anthony F. Smith and Eric Vincent's *Alien Fire*. (This was in the wake of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* phenomenon, and few of us lasted very long in the subsequent black-and-white glut.)

Anyway, I had always admired Fantagraphics and *The Comics Journal*, thinking at the time that its approach to comics was "intellectual," and therefore worthy of saving (although I've had my doubts

RIGHT: Covers of *Megaton Man* #4 and #6 (Kitchen Sink Press, June and October 1985). Coloring by Pete Poplaski.





since), and probably had a few sketches and maybe letters to the editor published in it as well as its sister publication, *Amazing Heroes*, by that time. I had been to the Thousand Oaks offices and knew publisher Gary Groth at any rate (he would later be the only person in California to cash my Kitchen Sink checks for the few months I tried to live out there, for which I will be eternally grateful). I seem to recall that another artist initially had been in mind to illustrate Moore's script, perhaps Gary Kwapisz, since I recall a "Gary" referred to in the script (Gary had been a frequent contributor of spot illos to *TCJ*, but hadn't yet gone "pro" on *Savage Sword of Conan*). Somehow the "art chores" fell to me, and I leapt at the opportunity, and probably devoted three weeks to drawing it (while Denis anxiously watched his color line not only slip into oblivion, but its only consistent money-maker and deadline hawk fall way off schedule).

The script spoiled me for all future collaborations. It was so dense in detail and background information, philosophical asides, and irrelevant digressions, more than could ever be drawn—it was as if Alan were simply putting all of his thoughts directly into my head, and then it would be *my* problem to translate and communicate those ideas to the reader. Alan didn't seem to mind if I chose a close-up or a long shot in any particular spot, since he had said what he wanted to say in the script and was for all intents and purposes done with it. It was *me* who would look like a fool if it didn't come off. This was the first script I ever illustrated besides my own legal-pad notes for *Megaton Man*, which was generally improvised page by page. I didn't realize at the time that it was natural to have sympathy for my own ideas, but not so easy to warm up to somebody else's, with Alan Moore being a miraculous exception among comic book scribes. Unfortunately, all subsequent scripts I've illustrated in comics as a "freelancer" were of the "Page 1, panel 1, caption, dialogue" variety—more like an impersonal Ikea instruction sheet for assembling a Billy bookcase, while Alan's script was like an inspired gourmet recipe (with personal asides from Julia Child).

Still, I took a few liberties, young buck that I was at the time (all of 24 years old). First, the original title had been "In Fictopia," which I promptly changed to "In Pictopia"—more visual, I thought (and if anyone objected, and nobody did, I could always change it back. We were doing this for free, after all). I also expanded the cramped 8 pages to a leisurely 13 pages, employing a Cinemascope "widescreen" panel to impose a steady rhythm. Boy, was I clever!

I drafted Kitchen Sink art director and *Steve Canyon* editor Pete Poplaski to pencil the barroom scene backgrounds, and he populated them with Joe Palooka, Kayo from *Moon Mullins*, and a variety of *Dick Tracy*-esque villains (Pete, now a successful realist painter living in Europe, used to begin his brilliant coloring on the covers for *Megaton Man* well after 11 pm on the eve of the printer's deadline). I drafted my junior high school bud Mike Kazaleh, then or soon to be working on *Critters* and *Captain Jack* for Fantagraphics, to pencil the scenes in "Funnytown," and the scene where an aging Goofy-type dog gets the crap kicked out of him by a bullying mob of *X-Men* types. This was all before *Who Killed Roger Rabbit*—Alan Moore had a post-modern, hybrid pop-culture sensibility well before we even recognized what that was.

The story was obviously a black comedy, satirizing the state of the American comic book industry

in the mid-1980s, which then seemed like it was going to hell in a hand-basket (an apocalyptic prediction that from the point of view of independent cartooning turned out to be mild). In those Direct Sales, Baxter-paper days, everything had to fit into the "continuity," everything had to be rationalized and explained for the sensibilities of literal-minded fans, everything had to be revamped and restarted, no matter how old or irrelevant the trademark, with shiny new costumes and new collector's item first issues emblazoned on the cover (even Denis Kitchen insisted on a new #1 when I drew *Return of Megaton Man* in 1988). But the story can also be read as the inexorable progress of late capitalist modernity, crushing all non-western contenders, and the inevitable extinction of individuality and originality in the contemporary world. In other words, it's just as apropos today as it was in 1986. Heck, I don't think you can even launch a humble comic book today unless the toy figure line, trading cards, computer games, big-budget movie, Happy Meals, and paperback adaptation are already lined up for synchronous release! Forget about pin-back buttons.

For years, I had no idea what became of my copy of the script—it was a bad photocopy of a badly typed manuscript, probably marked up with my original thumbnails. I wasn't sure if I had passed it along to Mike or Eric, although I would have thought I would have mailed copies of the copy, but perhaps I may have just foolishly discarded it after completing the job. Turns out I had mailed the script to Eric along with a scrawled note on Kitchen Sink Press stationery; Eric had wanted it to better interpret the requisite emotional mood of the story in color. I don't recall whose idea it was to draft Eric Vincent for the coloring, but it turned out to be a brilliant stroke. His colors added so much to the story and brought it to life in my opinion (a more recent reprint essayed a Photoshop interpretation which, unfortunately, could never take the place of Eric's work in my eyes).

I had met Alan briefly at the San Diego Comicon in 1985, and although he mistook me for the prematurely white-haired Steven Grant (a common occurrence in those days, since I was a very light blond), Alan was amiable and very familiar with my work. I showed him photocopies of my "Phloog Thing" sequence for the forthcoming *Megaton Man* #6, about the sawdust dummy that Megaton Man sat as his office desk as his secret identity when he was out on an adventure, who had been shot through with a nuclear missile and drenched in a bog, and miraculously brought back to life—a clear nod to Steve Bissette and John Totleben's work on Alan's *Swamp Thing*. Alan cheerily approved, and praised my mimicry of his writing. "But it *isn't* Trent Phloog. It never will be Trent Phloog. It never was Trent Phloog," Alan intoned. "Brilliant!"



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Pictopia is the allegorical city inhabited by old, forgotten, but once famous and iconic comics characters. Considered pitiable has-beens by the popular new comics characters who are gleefully and inevitably taking their places in the pop culture pantheon of celebrity, they roam the streets making ends meet, reliving their glory days, and living in moral and physical decrepitude, their spirits vanquished. It is both a paean to timeless, beloved comics characters and a scathing critique of the then-contemporary comics sub-culture.

"In Pictopia" is the legendary story created in 1986, written by the era's most adventurous mainstream comics writer and drawn by a bevy of indie cartoonists—helmed by Don Simpson, with Mike Kazaleh, Pete Poplaski, and Eric Vincent. Presented here for the first time, scanned from the original line art and full-color painted boards, in an appropriately oversized format.

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